

**ARKANSAS BETTER CHANCE
ADDITIONAL NOTES AND CLARIFICATION
2005-2006 REQUEST FOR APPLICATIONS (RFA)**

FUNDING

- Center-based programs will receive \$4400 per child for the 1st classroom (with a P-4 lead teacher). For all other classrooms, programs will receive \$4100 per child unless there is a P-4 or K-6 certified teacher in the room, in which case you will receive \$4400 per child.
- The amount of funding per child is determined by a core quality program model which includes minimum salary requirements. The salary range for a P-4 certified teacher is considerably greater than that of a teacher with an AA degree. Therefore, the classroom with the AA teacher does not need the same funding as that of a certified teacher.
- Upon approval, you will receive a letter stating the number of slots and the amount of funding you will receive for the year. Before you receive your first quarterly payment, you will also receive a grant agreement which must be signed by an authorized official from your agency.

PROGRAM ELIGIBILITY

- If your facility does NOT currently have Quality Approval status, you must request a separate application from the Division of Child Care and Early Childhood Education. Call 1-800-445-3316 or 501-682-9699 and request a Quality Approval application packet. If you have questions regarding Quality Approval, ask to speak with Vicki Mathews, Deborah Blackburn or Nancy Walker.
- Once an ABC application has been received, the Division will access the licensing record to check for any violations or corrective action. Applications for those programs with adverse licensing records may be denied. The Quality Approval database will also be checked to see if your facility has achieved accreditation status or has submitted an application for Quality Approval.

CHILD ELIGIBILITY

- Any new and expansion funding that is appropriated will come under the Arkansas Better Chance for School Success guidelines which uses income and birthdate as the ONLY eligibility criteria. Any child who is 3 or 4 by September 15, 2005 and whose family income is less than 200% of Federal Poverty Level is eligible. No other eligibility factor may be used.
- Income to be counted includes earned income by any household member over the age of 18 and unemployment payments. The ONLY acceptable documentation for eligibility includes copies of:
 - 1. Paycheck stubs
 - 2. 2004 Federal Tax Return
 - 3. AR Kids I.D. card
 - 4. Letter from social services agency verifying household income
 - 5. 2004 W-2
 - 6. Letter from employer with income amount
 - 7. 2004 Form 1040 Schedule C or F (for self-employed)

- Arkansas Better Chance for School Success is a full-time program. For the 2005-2006 program year, all three- and four-year old children must attend full days, five days per week. Programs must operate a minimum of 178 days.
- Children in families earning less than 200% of Federal Poverty Level are eligible for participation in the AR Kids program which covers basic health needs. Families may visit or call their nearest DHS office to apply for this program. The Division will make AR Kids applications available to all interested programs.

RENEWALS AND EXPANSIONS

- Existing programs with no programming changes must submit only those items listed in Section 1.6. If there is ANY change, that specific section of the application must be submitted as well.
- Renewal programs (with no expansion slots) will not be scored. However, ABC Program Specialists will examine the following information to determine if a renewal program is funded:
 - Past quarterly reports
 - Quality of Program Abstract, Collaboration plan and Budget submitted
 - Environmental Rating Scale scores
 - Compliance and Site Visit checklists
 - Licensing records
 - Quality Approval status
- If a renewal program did not achieve 100% enrollment this year, the program must justify the low enrollment in the program abstract. For example, there may be factors such as late notification of funding or complications with staff hiring or classroom setup. If there are significant reasons for the low enrollment, the Division may continue to fund all existing slots. Otherwise, a program may only be funded for the enrolled slots.

APPLICATION FORMAT

- If programs have BOTH center-based and home-based slots, SEPARATE applications must be submitted. The variation in programming issues, staff qualifications, funding formulas and grant scoring criteria make it necessary to separate these into two applications with two different budgets.
- Because the Division must ensure that any budget submitted will be honored and adhered to by the agency administration, the Superintendent, school board president or agency official authorized to enter into contracts must sign be the individual who signs the application.

STAFF QUALIFICATIONS

- Substitute teachers who serve in any ABC classroom 10 or more consecutive days per program year must have at least ten hours of early childhood training. An AA in early childhood education or CDA credential is preferred. Programs should submit training records to document hours.

- For paraprofessionals, the paraprofessional examination will not substitute for a CDA credential or AA degree in early childhood. After July 1, 2005, if the paraprofessional does not have a CDA or AA, the program must obtain approval from the Division before hiring.

BUDGET AND JUSTIFICATION

- While amounts in certain categories will vary depending on a specific program's needs, there are minimum prescribed amounts for salaries, fringe and professional development. Programs submitting budgets which do not meet the core quality guidelines will score less points on the budget section than those programs who do meet the guidelines. These points may make a difference as to which program is awarded funding. Please read through the scoring matrix to understand how many points each section is worth. Programs not meeting with core quality model will need to "make up" those points elsewhere in the RFA.
- One of the core components of ABC programs is a well-qualified and compensated staff. Competitive salary packages WITH benefits must be a part of any plan to ensure that component is met. Arkansas consistently ranks 46th or 47th in national teacher salary surveys and is last among all southern states. According to the American Federation of Teachers, the average salary for beginning teachers in Arkansas is 20% below the national average. (In Georgia, the starting salary for beginning teachers in 2003-2004 was estimated to be \$35,005.) Quality programs need to be leading the way to higher teacher salaries, especially when the state gives us the opportunity to offer programs these resources. The difficulty in recruiting education graduates into the early childhood field is great. In the private sector, many early childhood professionals have traditionally been paid an hourly wage with no benefits. ABC guidelines allow for a range of salary to be paid based upon actual degree and years of experience. If programs do not wish to pay within the guidelines, it does not mean they will not qualify or be approved. It does mean those programs must use 100% state ABC funding for classroom salaries (no match), show a 5% annual increase for those positions—starting next year—and make up those grant score points elsewhere in the RFA.
- Rule 12.02 states that the lead teacher has oversight responsibility for the paraprofessionals. By paying a higher salary for a lead teacher, a program can expect that staff person to assume more responsibilities outside of the contact hours, including administration and supervision. If a program has a coordinator, that position is not designed to be the highest paid position. Many programs have the ability to operate with only a part-time administrative person paid on an hourly basis from matching funds.
- Providers interested in applying must understand that ABC is NOT free daycare but a quality educational program designed to better equip at-risk preschoolers for success in school. As such, certain elements such as certified staff, approved curriculum and satisfactory scores on the environmental rating scale must be present. It takes a financial investment to make this program work. We recommend that if a private provider is looking for a source of funding that will add to a program's net income, it would be best not to consider ABC. However, ABC is a program that can supplement a private program already in place. Children from ABC may be blended in classrooms with children funded with private funds, as well as Head Start. We welcome providers to contact us with specific questions regarding your program.

- Professional development funds may be used to pay for continuing education through college and university courses. If the educational program is pertinent to early childhood and will help advance the staff person in his or her current position, professional development funds may be used to help classroom staff finish a degree program. All programs are encouraged to allow classroom staff this opportunity, if they so choose.
- Programs with over 60 children that purchased a computer this past year may budget for one (1) additional computer. Programs are allowed to purchase computers in order to allow teachers access to the on-line assessment and enrollment instruments. Therefore, computers purchased with ABC funds MUST BE ACCESSIBLE to the classroom teachers at reasonable hours.
- To calculate the match, you will multiply the amount you receive from the state by $\frac{2}{3}$. For example, a classroom of 20 children with a BA lead teacher will receive \$88,000 from state ABC funding. The required match will be $\$88,000 \times \frac{2}{3} = \$58,666.67$.